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SUBJECT: U.S. ATTENDS FIRST COUNCIL MEEETING OF THE INTERNATIONAL
BUREAU OF EDUCATION

¶1. (SBU) The U.S., represented by PAO and Dr. Larry Wexler, Director in the Department of Education's Special Education Programs, attended its first International Bureau of Education (IBE) council meeting in Geneva January 27-29. (The IBE is a UNESCO Category I institute specialized in providing expertise on curriculum reform and development.) The U.S. was elected to the 28-member council at the October 2009 UNESCO General Conference. This year's council meeting featured a forum on "Inclusive Education," as well a report on IBE's 2009 activities and the establishment of a strategic working group which will advise on transforming IBE into a UNESCO Center of Excellence.

¶2. (SBU) The council also elected Norway's Ole Briseid as president, with the following regional group vice-presidents: Georgia, Dominican Republic, Pakistan, Tanzania and Oman. Group 1, comprised of Western Europe and North America, appointed Israel, also a new member, as its representative on the administrative committee. After some negotiation, Switzerland and the U.S. agreed to serve as Group 1 representatives on the strategic working group, which will meet up to four times in 2010 as it maps out a plan of action to be approved at the January 2011 council meeting; the U.S. Department of Education has agreed to support Dr. Wexler as its designated expert. Switzerland, in its capacity as host country, has authorized the funding of an external consultant to facilitate the group's work.

¶3. (SBU) Reporting on its plan of action for 2010, IBE reported that it will continue to give special attention to UNESCO priorities in gender and Africa, as well as possibly expand its work in post-conflict situations. (Note: During IBE's report on its 2009 activities, several African delegates expressed concern that IBE was not active enough in Africa, which is a commonly heard refrain at UNESCO. End note.) While the catastrophic state of Haiti's education infrastructure was noted, council members agreed that the country's most urgent need was teacher training and counseling and school reconstruction; IBE's expertise in curriculum development would be best tapped once the situation stabilized.

¶4. (SBU) The council also approved the continuation of eight specific programs for 2010: communities of practice in curriculum development; technical assistance in Angola, Sudan and Vietnam; capacity-building in HIV and AIDS education; integration of ICTs such as Carnegie Mellon's GigaPan module in country curricula; "Learning for Life and Work" in sub-Saharan Africa; expanded access to EFA resources; promotion of dialogue on inclusive education; and, strengthening of the IBE council itself.

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